

## Health Literacy: More than a Reading Level!

### Application of Health Literacy Guidelines for Enhanced Client Communication and Improved Health Outcomes.

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## Learner Objectives

- ▶ Describe the impact of health literacy on health outcomes.
- ▶ Identify clients with low health literacy.
- ▶ Apply strategies for improved communication and enhanced understanding for clients with low health literacy.
- ▶ Understand ethical implications of health literacy for Nutrition and Dietetics Professionals.

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## Ltlaeh Ycaretil

- ▶ Snoised htlaeh etairporppa ekam ot deaden secivres dna noitamrofni htlaeh cisab dnatsrednu dna, ssecorp, niatbo ot yticapac eht evah slauidivdni hcihw ot eerged eht si ycaretil ltlaeh.
- ▶ Ecar dna, level noitacude, sutats, tnemyolpme, emocni, ega, naht htlaeh 'Inosrep a fo rotciderp a si ycaretil htlaeh roop.

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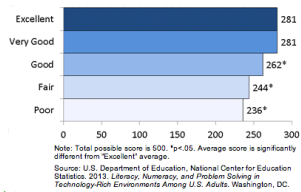
## Health Literacy

- ▶ Health literacy is the degree to which individuals have the capacity to **obtain**, **process**, and **understand** basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions.
  - ▶ Institute of Medicine
- ▶ "Poor health literacy is a stronger predictor of a person's health than age, income, employment status, education level, and race."
  - ▶ American Medical Association
- ▶ [Dr. House](#)

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Adults with higher literacy scores report better health, which suggests they have a stronger set of skills to prevent disease and protect their health.

U.S. Adults Self-Rated Health Status and 2012 PIAAC Average Literacy Scores



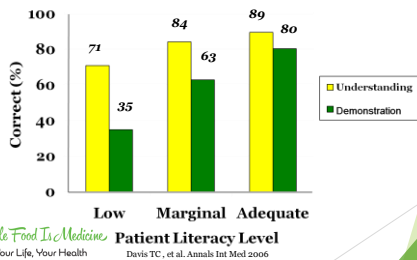
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## Health Literacy Overview

- ▶ Health literacy affects a person's ability to:
  - ▶ Navigate the healthcare system.
  - ▶ Communicate & conduct intense discussions.
  - ▶ Interpret charts, figures, etc.
  - ▶ Read & understand health information.
  - ▶ Engage in chronic disease self-management.
  - ▶ Adopt health promotion behaviors.
  - ▶ Utilizing medical devices in the home setting.
  - ▶ Making informed, decisions on healthcare issues.
  - ▶ Following dosing instructions on meds

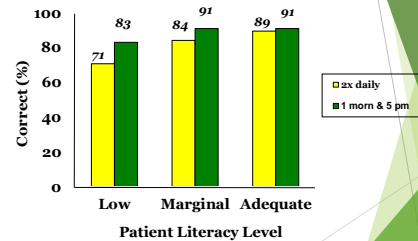
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## Rates of Correct Understanding vs. Demonstration "Take Two Tablets by Mouth Twice Daily"



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## Rates of Correct Understanding "Take two tablets by mouth twice daily" vs "Take one tablet in the morning and one at 5pm"



Wolf et al. Patient Education and Counseling 2007

## Behavioral outcomes

- ▶ Persons with limited health literacy skills are more likely to:
  - ▶ Have less knowledge of their illness (e.g., diabetes).
  - ▶ Have chronic conditions and less likely to manage them effectively.
  - ▶ Skip preventive measures like screenings.
  - ▶ Experience more preventable hospital visits and admissions.
  - ▶ Report their health as "poor."

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## Healthcare costs

- ▶ Estimated costs of approximately \$1000 more per hospitalized patient with inadequate health literacy (measured by the S-TOFHLA) than that of persons with adequate health literacy.
- ▶ Annual estimate of \$106 - \$238 billion to U.S. economy.
- ▶ Improved health communication can decrease costs and improve quality of care.

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National Network of Libraries of Medicine, 2019.

## Ethical obligations in helping to improve client understanding

- ▶ Updated Code of Ethics for the Nutrition and Dietetics Profession, effective June 1, 2018, addresses health literacy.
- ▶ ALL credentialed professionals are held accountable to the code, regardless of Academy membership status.
  - ▶ Four Principles, 32 standards
  - ▶ Principle 3: Professionalism
    - ▶ Standard h. Nutrition and dietetics practitioners shall communicate at an appropriate level to promote health literacy.

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## Who is at risk?

- ▶ The problem of limited health literacy is greater among:
  - ▶ Older adults
  - ▶ Those who are poor
  - ▶ People with limited education
  - ▶ Minority populations
  - ▶ Persons with limited English proficiency (LEP)

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## Some common characteristics among low-literate adults:

- ▶ Take instructions literally.
  - ▶ "push fluids"
- ▶ Read slowly and miss the meaning.
- ▶ May not think in terms of **classes of information** and may skip over uncommon words.
  - ▶ "poultry" vs. "chicken"
- ▶ May miss the context or have problems processing information; may not be able to make inferences from factual data.

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## Red flags for low health literacy

- ▶ Frequently missed appointments
- ▶ Incomplete registration forms
- ▶ Poor adherence to medication
- ▶ Unable to name medications, explain purpose or dosing
- ▶ Identifies pills by looking at them, not reading label
- ▶ Unable to give coherent, sequential history
- ▶ Asks fewer questions
- ▶ Lack of follow-through on tests or referrals

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## Twenty complicated and commonly used words

- |                 |                        |
|-----------------|------------------------|
| ▶ Screening     | ▶ Mental Health        |
| ▶ Dermatologist | ▶ Annually             |
| ▶ Immunization  | ▶ Depression           |
| ▶ Contraception | ▶ Respiratory problems |
| ▶ Hypertension  | ▶ Community Resources  |
| ▶ Oral          | ▶ Monitor              |
| ▶ Diabetes      | ▶ Cardiovascular       |
| ▶ Diet          | ▶ Referral             |
| ▶ Hygiene       | ▶ Eligible             |
| ▶ Prevention    | ▶ Arthritis            |

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## Helping to improve client understanding

- ▶ Use clear communication techniques
  - ▶ Plain, every day language
  - ▶ Specific, concrete information
  - ▶ Speak slowly
  - ▶ Limit to 3-5 main points
  - ▶ Encourages questions by asking:
    - ▶ "What questions do you have?"
    - ▶ "Do you have any questions?"
- ▶ Ask patients to state back key points in their own words (Teach-back method)

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## Teach-back

**Explain**

**Assess**

**Clarify**

**Understanding**



## Teach Back: Confirm client understands

- ▶ Some evidence suggests the use of teach-back is associated with improved control of blood sugars.
  - ▶ "Tell me what you've understood."
  - ▶ "I want to make sure I explained it correctly. Can you tell me in your own words how you understand the plan?"

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## Research says we tend to remember:

- ▶ 10% of what we read
- ▶ 20% of what we hear
- ▶ 30% of what we see
- ▶ 50% of what we hear and see
- ▶ 70% of what we say
- ▶ 90% of what we both say and do
  - ▶ Have client give a demonstration or participate in a simulation
  - ▶ Have a conversation with client

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## Passive learning activities

- ▶ Reading
- ▶ Hearing words
- ▶ Looking at pictures
- ▶ Watching a demonstration
- ▶ Watching a movie
- ▶ Looking at an exhibit
- ▶ Seeing it done in the actual setting

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## Follow these guidelines in writing

- ▶ Respect the intended audience.
- ▶ Include only the information needed to convey the **behavioral objective**.
- ▶ Organize topics in the order the reader will use them.
- ▶ Present the most important points first and last.
- ▶ Group information into chunks, with a clear, ordered format.

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## Follow these guidelines in writing

- ▶ Give the reader an action step to take right away.
- ▶ Use **short sentences** and paragraphs.
- ▶ Write in the **active voice**.
- ▶ Clarify concepts with examples.
- ▶ Avoid jargon, technical terms, abbreviations and acronyms.
- ▶ **AVOID USING ALL CAPS.**

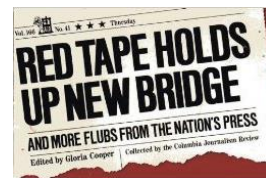
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## Rewrite the following:

- ▶ The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends a half hour or more of moderate physical activity on most days, preferably every day. The activity can include brisk walking, calisthenics, home care, gardening, moderate sports exercise, and dancing.
- ▶ Do at least 30 minutes of exercise, like brisk walking, most days of the week.

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## The problem with ambiguous writing



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Ripped from the headlines:

## British Left Waffles on Falkland Islands

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[www.plainlanguage.gov/humor](http://www.plainlanguage.gov/humor)

What about the syrup??



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Ripped from the headlines:

## Kids Make Nutritious Snacks

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[www.plainlanguage.gov/humor](http://www.plainlanguage.gov/humor)

I like mine salty!



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## Ripped from the headlines:

### Local High School Dropouts Cut in Half

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[www.plainlanguage.gov/humor](http://www.plainlanguage.gov/humor)

## High Schoolers Beware!



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## Ripped from the headlines!

- ▶ Iraqi Head Seeks Arms
- ▶ Hospitals are Sued by 7 Foot Doctors
- ▶ Miners Refuse to Work after Death
  - ▶ The nerve!
- ▶ Something Went Wrong in Jet Crash, Expert Says
- ▶ Police Begin Campaign to Run Down Jaywalkers
- ▶ Enraged Cow Injures Farmer with Ax
- ▶ Farmer Bill Dies in House
- ▶ Teacher Strikes Idle Kids
- ▶ Juvenile Court to Try Shooting Defendant
- ▶ If Strike Isn't Settled Quickly, It May Last Awhile

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[www.plainlanguage.gov/humor](http://www.plainlanguage.gov/humor)

## Follow these guidelines in design

- ▶ Use graphics and design to make the reader's job easier, and to increase comprehension and recall.
- ▶ Don't assume that graphics are more effective than words for low-literacy audiences.
  - ▶ Make good use of both when possible.

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*Wear gloves to keep from spreading germs.*

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From: Simply Put. A guide for creating easy-to-understand materials.  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, April 2009.



*Always wear a hard hat at the job site.*

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From: Simply Put. A guide for creating easy-to-understand materials.  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, April 2009.

Which image to promote healthy eating?



Image A



Image B

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From: Simply Put. A guide for creating easy-to-understand materials.  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, April 2009.

Not all cultures read left to right



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## Which is easier to read and why?

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Document A

Document B

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From: Simply Put: A guide for creating easy-to-understand materials.  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, April 2009.

### Example A

Children should get six shots by age 2:

- ☐ measles, mumps, rubella
- ☐ *Haemophilus influenzae* type b
- ☐ polio
- ☐ diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis
- ☐ hepatitis B
- ☐ varicella

### Example B

By age 2, children should get shots against measles/mumps/rubella; *Haemophilus influenzae* type b; polio; diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis; hepatitis B; and varicella.

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From: Simply Put: A guide for creating easy-to-understand materials.  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, April 2009.

### Paragraph A

This column is only 20 to 25 characters long and is hard to read. Your eyes jump back and forth too much and quickly get tired.

### Paragraph B

This column is the best length. It is 40 to 50 characters long. Your eye can return to the beginning of the next line easily, and it doesn't jump back and forth very much. Try to design your materials like this one.

### Paragraph C

This paragraph is hard to read because the lines are too long. After reading one line, your eyes have to move back across the entire page to find the start of the next line. Paragraphs that run across the whole page also look very dense and don't allow for much white space on the page.

From: Simply Put: A guide for creating easy-to-understand materials.  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, April 2009.

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*Sample 1*  
This column does not have a right-justified margin. The spaces between words are even. The jagged right edge also makes it easier to distinguish one line from the others.

*Sample 2*  
This column has right-justified margins. The spaces between words are uneven and the lines are all the same length. This can confuse readers, especially unskilled readers, and make it harder to differentiate one line from the others.

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From: Simply Put. A guide for creating easy-to-understand materials.  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, April 2009.

## Strategies and Counseling Tips

- ▶ Prior to appointment
  - ▶ Review appointment reminder systems
    - ▶ Letters-are they confusing?
    - ▶ Phone call reminders may be helpful
  - ▶ Assess your phone tree system
    - ▶ Is it easy to navigate?
  - ▶ Encourage client to bring list of questions to appointment

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## Strategies and Counseling Tips

- ▶ In the waiting room
  - ▶ Make environment warm and welcoming
    - ▶ A front desk smile goes a long way!
  - ▶ Signs
    - ▶ Clear and easy to follow?
  - ▶ Forms
    - ▶ Can they be simplified?
    - ▶ Be alert for clients having difficulty filling out forms.

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## Strategies and Counseling Tips

- ▶ During appointment
  - ▶ Avoid information overload.
  - ▶ Use the Teach-Back method.
  - ▶ Ask "what questions do you have?"

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## Summary Points

- ▶ Patients require access to *accurate* and *actionable* health information.
- ▶ A patient's *ability to understand and act* on the information has the greatest affect on their overall health
- ▶ It is our professional and ethical responsibility for assuring our patients understand!
  - ▶ Recognize high risk populations, but assume everyone is at risk.
  - ▶ Verbal and written communication skills.
  - ▶ Encourage questions.

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## Professional Resources

- ▶ Agency for Health Care Research and Quality. Health Literacy. <https://www.ahrq.gov/topics/health-literacy.html>
- ▶ Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. Health Literacy Universal Precautions Toolkit. <https://www.ahrq.gov/professionals/quality-patient-safety/quality-resources/tools/literacy-toolkit/index.html>
- ▶ American Medical Association. Health Literacy Video (short version). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ubPkdpGHIWAQ>
- ▶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Health Literacy. <https://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/index.html>

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## Professional Resources

- ▶ Developing and Assessing Nutrition Education Handouts: <https://eatrightfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/DANEHChecklist.pdf>.
- ▶ Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Health Literacy [https://health.gov/communication/?\\_ga=2.142321714.1425959897.1564582800-1919734031.1530552905](https://health.gov/communication/?_ga=2.142321714.1425959897.1564582800-1919734031.1530552905) (includes great presentation on how to promote health literacy with your website)
- ▶ National Institutes of Health. Clear Communication. <https://www.nih.gov/institutes-nih/nih-office-director/office-communications-public-liaison/clear-communication>
- ▶ Readable-web tool for entering text and getting feedback on reading level and sentence length. <https://readable.com/>

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Questions?

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